

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

characterization: the way a writer creates and develops a character's traits

characters: the people, animals, or imaginary creatures in a work of literature

character traits: the qualities shown by a character

inferences: reasonable judgments, based on prior knowledge and the text

HERE'S HOW

Step 1: Identify methods of characterization. Writers use four main methods of characterization to develop characters:

- **Direct comments** about a character's traits.

EXAMPLE Candida was not candid. She was, as we say, a teller of lies.

- **Physical descriptions** of the character.

EXAMPLE Finely-tailored clothes hung perfectly on George's body.

- **Thoughts, speech, and actions** of a character

EXAMPLE Amy glanced at Nick's test sheet. She wondered, should she copy? Then she thought about the grade. Quickly she circled "b."

- **What other characters think, say, or do** toward one another.

EXAMPLE Nick rolled his eyes. "Why can't that girl just study?" he thought.

Step 2: Make inferences about characters. Writers may describe characters indirectly, providing clues. Look for clues that allow you to make an inference or an educated guess about the character.

EXAMPLE

Try finding the clues that lead you to get to know Lenore in the following passage:

Miss Walker (*quietly*). Lenore, that was beautiful.

(*Lenore gives a shy, tentative smile*)

Girl # 1. It was just like a book.

(*There is a silent moment after this pronouncement. Lenore looks at the other students trying to suppress her excitement.*)

Miss Walker. I'm really very impressed, Lenore. Leave your story on my desk. There are some people I'd like to show it to.

—Keith Leckie, Words on a Page

Miss Walker respects and admires Lenore.
Lenore is a shy, modest girl.

Lenore does not like to show off.

Lenore is a talented writer.